

the poet's *Letters* in 1894. But, half a century after his death, misfortune still dogged Beddoes. The edition was perfunctorily carried out; and the manuscripts, returned to Browning's son in Italy, disappeared in die confusion that followed his death. What became of them remains to this day obscure; there seems no basis for the story once told, that 'Pen⁵ Browning's servants ransacked their dead master's house, and that no one knew what scented tresses of some dark Italian beauty, faded now in their turn, the papers of Beddoes might have perished at last to curl. Finally in 1928 Gosse produced a grandiose new edition of the *Letters and Poetical Works*, ornamented with decorations from Holbein's *Dance of Death*; but before its completion he too died; and with this new edition reappeared—alas!—the errors and corruptions and mutilations of the old. Beddoes might well have laughed in his grave.

Not that it is much easier to know what the poet was really like, than what he really did. The letters are eccentric, cold, impersonal—all the more impersonal for being filled with a great deal of bitter badinage. His jests serve him, one feels, for shield as well as sword. That sardonic smile makes his face more than ever of a mask. Poetry, Anatomy, Liberty—he pursued each in turn, to disillusion at the last. There is little trace in his life of affection, apart from the mysterious

Degen: 1 fear
I am a non-conductor of friendship, a not-
very-likeable
person, so that I must make sure of my
own respect.'
And yet this coldness has an air of being
studied rather
than natural. There is a Byronic pose in his
saturnine
description of his behaviour on a voyage to
Hamburg—
how he 'remained impenetrably proud and
silent every
wave of the way, dropping now and then a
little venom
into the mixture of conversation to make it
effervesce';